

By Martin Gould and Kathleen Walter

The death of Osama bin Laden means virtually nothing in the long term for America's fight against radical Muslim terrorists, U.S. Rep. Allen West tells Newsmax.TV.

Al-Qaida will strike back, predicted the Florida GOP congressman, a retired Army lieutenant colonel.

"We had better understand that there are going to be retaliatory attacks, there are going to be reprisals because they have to show that they are still relevant and still a viable terrorist network," West told Newsmax in an exclusive interview.

The suggestion that al-Qaida is a spent force because of bin Laden's death was "the most insidious statement that I could ever think of," he said.

"We are dealing with a multi-headed hydra, not just al-Qaida but the Taliban, Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, al-Quds Martyrs Brigade – I could go on ad infinitum.

"You took off the head of one of those hydras, but it can regenerate itself very quickly," said West, who served in Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm, as well as in Iraq.

During his wide-ranging talk, West agreed that none of the likely candidates for the Republican presidential nomination is setting the race on fire, but he ruled out any suggestion that would throw his hat in the ring. When asked directly whether he would run, he replied: "I'm running for United States Congress, Congress District 22, in 2012."

He refused to be drawn on his preferred candidate and said Newt Gingrich had only damaged his own credibility, not the party's, with his criticism of Rep. Paul Ryan's budget proposals.

Donald Trump, he said, had taken people out of their comfort zones with his abortive campaign, but West had never really expected the property tycoon to run, likening him to a fast-starting "rabbit" in a middle-distance track race. "He came on to try to push an agenda or try to push a conversation to a certain point but he was not going to be able to go the distance.

"Right now it's still kind of lukewarm," he said of the nomination process. "You have a pretty blah atmosphere out there so I think we just have to wait to see what we have in September-October."

Regarding the debt crisis, West said Democrats and Republicans simply have to find common ground and strike a deal. "The future of this nation is at stake, especially our fiscal future," he said. "America is on the verge of . . . going broke.

But he accepted that it will be difficult because of the "huge ideological chasm" between the two parties. "This is an opportunity for us to get our fiscal house in order and there are certain conditions — spending control measures — that we have to implement."